

FACT SHEET: Sign Ordinance adopted July 21, 2015, by City Council

■ HISTORY

The process of revising the City of Knoxville's sign ordinance started in February 2012, when City Council appointed a citizen Sign Ordinance Task Force to conduct a comprehensive review of the City's sign regulations. Councilman Duane Grieve served as chair of the task force and Councilman George Wallace served as its vice chair.

The task force met over a three-year period, leading to a specially-called City Council meeting on April 9, 2015, to discuss and vote on proposed amendments to the Sign Ordinance. The council voted to send the ordinance back to the Metropolitan Planning Commission to consider further specific issues.

MPC staff recommended amendments, and on June 11, 2015, MPC unanimously approved a draft of the ordinance.

City Council then legislated additional changes and passed the ordinance in its present form on July 21, 2015.

Here is the approved 39-page ordinance:

http://www.knoxvilletn.gov/UserFiles/Servers/Server_109478/File/CityCouncil/sign/signordinance_final.pdf

■ THE NEW ORDINANCE

The ordinance divides aspects of sign regulations into 15 separate, clearly-organized sections.

In addition to making regulatory changes, one objective of the ordinance update was simply to make it easier for citizens and permit applicants to find and understand the provisions of the ordinance.

Previously, the sign regulations – some untouched for decades – were poorly organized. The old ordinance was not easy to navigate.

The new ordinance centralizes all regulations of signs in one place, presented in an orderly lineup of sections that allows users to more quickly find a specific provision and access information.

■ HEIGHTS AND SIZES OF DETACHED SIGNS

Section 11 of the ordinance deals with sign regulations in specific zone districts. In one subsection, it sets maximum sign heights and maximum square footage for primary detached signs in commercial and industrial zone districts, based on the classification of the road where the sign is located.

ROADWAY TYPE	MAXIMUM SIGN HEIGHT
- Property within 500 feet of interstate interchange area	35 feet
- Property adjacent to interstate right-of-way	30 feet
- Property fronting on federally designated highways	20 feet
- All other roadway classifications	10 feet

ROADWAY TYPE	MAXIMUM SIGN AREA
- Property within 500 feet of interstate interchange area	200 square feet
- Property adjacent to interstate right-of-way	200 square feet
- Property fronting on	165 square feet

federally designated
highways

- All other roadway classifications 100 square feet

■ SIZES OF ATTACHED OR WALL SIGNS

Section 11 also outlines the maximum allowable size for attached signs (signs permanently affixed to or painted on a building or wall) in specific zone districts.

How is the maximum allowable size for these attached signs calculated? That's detailed in Section 6.4 of the ordinance.

Examples of some of the regulations by zone districts:

- Agricultural and Open Space (nameplates or wall signs for approved home occupations) – 2 square feet
- Floodway (identification signs for parks and playgrounds) – 9 square feet
- Historic Overlay (information signs, subject to approval by the Historic Zoning Commission) – 9 square feet
- Residential (approved home occupations) – 2 square feet
- Residential (boarding houses, fraternities, sororities) – 9 square feet
- Residential (smaller medical facilities, clubhouses for nonprofit organizations, studios and daycares) – 16 square feet
- Residential (larger medical facilities, churches, schools, cemeteries) – 32 square feet
- Office – sign not to exceed 5 percent of the wall area
- Commercial and industrial – 10 percent of the wall area
- Mixed use – 5 percent of the wall area

■ ORDINANCE INDEX

The 15 sections of the new Sign Ordinance range from setting out what signs are permitted in specific districts, to the square footage area of signs and their heights in commercial and industrial zones, to the process for removing abandoned signs, to administration of sign regulations and establishing fees.

Here's an index breaking down the 15 sections:

SECTION 1 – General provisions – the purpose, intent, applicability and scope of the ordinance.

SECTION 2 – A glossary of definitions used in the ordinance. For example: What's a "nit," a "footcandle," or a "candela"? This section defines 17 phrases. Also, this section identifies 44 categories of sign types – everything from signs on poles or on walls to menu boards, moveable sidewalk signs or awning signs.

SECTION 3 – Prohibited signs, such as signs within public right-of-way or signs with flashing lights.

SECTION 4 – Signs exempt from regulation, such as utility signs, special-event signs or traffic-control measures.

SECTION 5 – Signs exempt from permit requirements, such as temporary signs announcing construction work or real estate open houses.

SECTION 6 – Criteria for measuring signs' area and height.

SECTION 7 – General sign standards and requirements – minimum setbacks, for example, or standards for illumination.

SECTION 8 – Standards for specific sign types.

SECTION 9 – Master sign plans for unified developments – shopping centers, office parks and large-scale commercial or mixed-use developments.

SECTION 10 – Signs permitted in all districts.

SECTION 11 – Signs permitted in specific districts – includes new maximum allowable heights and sizes for signs in commercial and industrial zone districts.

SECTION 12 – Sign construction and maintenance.

SECTION 13 – Abandoned signs – defining abandonment and detailing the process for removing abandoned signs.

SECTION 14 – Legal non-conforming signs.

SECTION 15 – Administration – permit requirements, authority for enforcement of sign regulations, and setting sign construction permit fees (\$80 per \$1,000 of sign construction value).

■ QUESTIONS?

Contact Plans Review and Inspections at 865-215-2999.